

MT. EVANS CREST HOUSE

Mt. Evans, Arapaho National Forest, Idaho Springs vicinity  
Clear Creek County  
Colorado

HABS. No. CO-81

HABS  
COLO,  
10-IDASP.V,  
1A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historical American Building Survey  
National Park Service  
Rocky Mountain Regional Office  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, CO 80255

MT. EVANS CREST HOUSE

Location: Mt. Evans Summit, State Route 5, Arapaho National Forest,  
Idaho Springs vicinity, Clear Creek County, Colorado  
Present Owner: U.S. Forest Service, Region 2  
Present Occupant: None, ruins  
Present Use: Ruins

Statement of  
Significance: The Mt. Evans Crest House represents the highest  
business structure in the United States. Located at  
the summit of Mt. Evans, at 14,260 feet, this  
structure is one of the oldest architectural  
features at such an altitude. The Mt. Evans Crest  
House not only represents very unusual architecture,  
but it also is at the top of the highest paved  
automobile road in America. The Mt. Evans Crest  
House, until it burned in 1979, was a significant  
architectural design in a very unusual location.  
The property has been determined eligible for  
inclusion in the National Register of Historic  
Places based on its unique architecture, its  
association with persons important in Colorado  
history, and based on the work of a master.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Date of Erection: 1939-1941  
Architect: Edwin A. Francis

Historical Narrative

The Mt. Evans Crest House, located at an altitude of 14,260 feet  
above sea level on the summit of Mt. Evans, Colorado, was built in

1939-1941, just prior to World War II, by Justus "Gus" Roehling. The structure was designed by Denver architect Edwin A. Francis who created a building that incorporated the rugged, above-timberline environment with a tourist attraction where some 100,000 visitors a year could overlook the plains of Colorado to the east and the Continental Divide to the west.

The Crest House cost some \$50,000 to build and was constructed by Thayer Tutt of the Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs, Colorado. In addition, J. Quigg Newton, later Mayor of Denver, and W.S. Carnsey III, were investors. The purpose of the building was to take advantage of the auto road to the summit, as a concession, and to serve the numerous visitors who found their way up the mountain.

The Crest House was operated by the Broadmoor Hotel Company until 1956 when it was sold to Helen Wilson Stewart, operator of the Pike's Peak Summit House. At that time, the Stewart Corporation, which is a family business, operated the Crest House as a place to buy souvenirs, as a coffee shop where the famous Pike's Peak donuts were also made, and as an emergency center. Oxygen was available, as was first aid for hikers and climbers. Often the Crest House was the center of operations for search and rescue forces seeking a lost hiker.

The Crest House was under the management of William Stewart Carle and his son William, Junior. The Carle's continued to manage the property after it reverted to the U.S. Forest Service in 1969, as part of the original lease/permit agreement. Since Mt. Evans is owned by the Forest Service, the Crest House was built as a leased inholding.

On September 1, 1979, a propane gas leak caused a fire that gutted the Crest House. The Idaho Springs Volunteer Fire Department made it to the scene in 28 minutes, but there was nothing left of the Crest House

than the concrete walls. The heat from the fire melted the glass windows, warped the steel beams and, of course, the wooden interior was a total loss.

The only remains after the fire were the four poured concrete walls and several interior concrete walls. The intense heat cracked some of the facade stones and separated them from the concrete walls. The property has been abandoned since 1979.

Biographical Information - Edwin A. Francis

According to the University of Colorado Architecture and Engineering Library, Edwin A. Francis practised architecture in the Denver/Colorado Springs area from the 1930s to the mid-1960s. He died in the late 1960s. In addition to his design of the Mt. Evans Crest House, another major piece of architectural work for which he is well-known is the Broadmoor Hotel's International Center, built in 1961. It was the largest parabolic structure of its type in the world at the time. Francis's widow and daughter still live in the Denver area.

Biographical Information - Justus "Gus" Roehling

Gus Roehling was a German immigrant builder who worked in the Kittredge, Colorado and Evergreen, Colorado areas. He built numerous homes and public buildings (such as churches) during his career as a contractor. His style was "old world" in that he preferred the use of field stone as a facade material and he often included details that were European in nature, such as dormers, high peaked roofs, and very detailed window and door designs. Many of Roehling's buildings can still be seen in the Evergreen region. His construction of the Crest House was unique in that all the materials had to be hauled up Mt. Evans and mixed or poured on site. This was no small task given the road to, and the

elevation of, this building. His use of native stone for the walls was a Roehling trademark and the Crest House is no exception. His preference for heavy wood doors and "European style" windows is also classic Roehling. Of the various buildings Gus Roehling built, he was most proud of the Crest House. Roehling died in Evergreen, Colorado, on August 15, 1984, at the age of 89. He is buried in the Evergreen Cemetery.

#### ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

1. Architectural Merit and Interest: The Mt. Evans Crest House is of architectural merit based on its unique design and its unusual environmental location.
2. Condition of Fabric: Poor, building is ruins.
3. Summary Description: The Mt. Evans Crest House is a multi-storied structure of no particular design. It has an unusual facade of three arches opening to a two story viewing platform. The design is a combination of Organic, Futuristic, and Art Moderne adapted to a hostile environment on a 14,000 foot mountain-top. The stonework blends into its surroundings to a point that from a distance, it is hard to see the building. Francis's design was intended to symbolize the moon and the stars. To that end, he designed a star shaped viewing area overlooking Denver to the east and the front range to the north and using round light fixtures to represent moons. The materials in the building are poured concrete walls, rock facing, steel beams in the viewing area and roof, with a knotty pine panelled interior. Hardwood floors served the five levels of the building. The doors and windows were also wood and were renowned for their very heavy construction.

Detailed Description of Exterior

1. Foundation: Reinforced concrete.
2. Wall Construction: The exterior walls are poured concrete using "lifts" of about 12 to 14 inches. The poured concrete was not finished other than for the exterior rockwork and the interior pine panelling. The rockwork was of native stone that represented the environment in which the Crest House was built. The rock facing was moss rock and apparently came from on-site. A major design feature of the concrete walls and the rockwork was the quadruple arch wall that flowed from the star platform to the east side of the building. These arches, while part of the structure, were also decorative in nature. The arches soared to a peak at the front entrance of the building, while flowing eastward in descending order of size from the largest arch at the point of the beginning of the star platform, to the smallest arch at the foot of the stairway to the entrance. By using this design, the building "blended" into the summit of Mt. Evans.
3. Structural Systems: Poured concrete with concrete walls and floors.
4. Porches, Stoops, Etc.: None
5. Openings, Doorways and Windows: The central feature of the building was the "star platform" which overlooked the eastern plains of Colorado. This platform was two stories high and made of steel and glass. The other openings such as the two doors and several windows were wood frame and of heavy construction. The front of the building has five small windows. There was a large expanse of glass on the east side of the building. The east side also had two areas of fixed glass panes while the back wall had two small windows and there were

glass corner windows on each side. None of the original wooden door and window frames survive.

6. Roof - Shape and Covering: The roof was a multi-level flat roof made of composition material and covered with tar. This was a replacement roof. The original roof blew off in 1942 and was replaced with the flat roof. The first roof was of Italian tile in the style of the Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs.

#### Detailed Description of Interior

1. Interior-Basic Description: Because the interior has been destroyed by fire, it is somewhat difficult to describe what remains. Several of the interior walls, made of poured concrete, have collapsed or have been pushed over. Most of the steel framework of the star platform has been cut away and removed. The roof timbers and roofing itself has been cleared away.
2. Interior-Description of the Star Platform: There were apparently five levels in the building. The viewing chamber was two stories high, made of steel I-beams, glass, and it had wooden floors. The upper level of the star platform was a cafe that had tables and a lunch counter. Behind the star platform, a kitchen/service area was located. This room was built directly against the south face of Mt. Evans.
3. Interior-Description of the Curio Room: The Curio Room was adjacent to the cafe/lunch counter portion of the building. A large counter was available to sell curios including "genuine Indian artifacts." The Curio Room was to the right of the front entrance of the building, while the cafe/lunch counter room was directly to the left of the main door.

4. Interior-Description of Other Rooms: In addition to the described public areas, there were living quarters on the east end of the structure for employecs of the Crest House. Staff members lived in these quarters, which were small rooms with bunks, during the summer months. Usually, college students from the Denver area served as staffers. Next to the quarters section, public restrooms were located. This part of the building is still visible with plumbing for the toilets quite evident in the poured concrete walls.
5. Interior-Description of Lower Area and Terraces: The area under the staff quarters was used for storage and supplies. The original plans called for viewing terraces to be built in front of this level of the building and around the first level of the star platform area. Contemporary photos of the building indicate that these terraces were never built.

#### Site and Surroundings

1. The Mt. Evans Crest House (Smithsonian Site Number 5CC200) is located at the summit of Mt. Evans, at an altitude of 14,260 feet above sea level. The front of the building faces west-northwest. The star platform faced on a north-northeast orientation, overlooking the Colorado plains and mountains. The back of the building was built against a rocky hill (on which a University of Denver Observatory is located) and has a east-southeast orientation. The Crest House is well above timberline and there is virtually no vegetation in the area. The basic environment is rocks and large boulders. The front of the building faces a paved parking lot which is used by the many visitors to the summit. To the south of the parking lot, there are two precast concrete toilets and several wind proof trash bins.

These have been installed by the U.S. Forest Service in the last few years. They are far enough from the Crest House so as not to intrude on its basic setting.

#### SOURCES OF INFORMATION

##### Project Data

The U.S. Forest Service obtained a settlement of \$450,000 for the loss of the Crest House from the propane company whose faulty connection caused the fire that destroyed the building. After several years of consideration as to what to do about the site, the Forest Service, in 1985, made the decision not to rebuild the Crest House primarily because it would cost an estimated \$2 million to restore this property. Rather, the settlement funds would be used to build a precast concrete shelter building that could be attached to the facade of the Crest House ruins.

This historical documentation of the Mt. Evans Crest House was completed by Dr. Frederic J. Athearn, Historian, Colorado State Office, Bureau of Land Management, 2850 Youngfield St., Lakewood, Colorado 80215, under an Interagency Agreement with the Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest, U.S. Forest Service. It is one portion of the historical recordation of the Mt. Evans Crest House that also includes photodocumentation of the building ruins. This recordation conforms with the standards of the Historic American Buildings Survey, U.S. Department of the Interior.

#### SOURCES

##### Interviews

Interview with William Carle, Sr. and William Carle, Jr., Pike's Peak Summit House, Colorado. July 25, 1986.

## Bibliography

### 1. Letters

Letter from Barbara Carle Day to Gloria Weisburger. Colorado Historical Society, October 18, 1985.

Letter from Leslie E. Wildesen, Colorado Historical Society, to Larry Linder, U.S. Forest Service, February 24, 1986.

### 2. Books

Eichler, George R. Colorado Place Names. Boulder, Colorado: Johnson, 1977.

Mehls, Steven F. The New Empire of the Rockies, A History of Northeast Colorado. Denver: Bureau of Land Management, 1984.

Mehls, Steven F. Colorado Mountains Historic Context [RP-3]. Denver: Colorado Historical Society, 1984.

Naeve, Milo M. A Century of Building in the Pikes Peak Region. Colorado Springs, Colorado: Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, 1972.

### 3. Articles

The Architect and Building News. London. May 22, 1942.

The Architectural Forum. [London?]. September 1941, p. 72.

Denver Post. Denver, Colorado. August 14, 1949.

Denver Post. Denver, Colorado. July 30, 1986.

Hotel and Catering Management. [N.L.], April 1942, p.76.

Hart, Lee. "Roehling Services Held Atop Mt. Evans." Canyon Courier. Evergreen, Colorado. August 29, 1984, p. 3

Lueders, J.F. "C-223903, Pikes Peak Outbusted." The Concentrator.

Boston: Massachusetts Bonding and Insurance Company, Vol. 12, Number 4., April 1941.

Marshall, Debbie. "USFS Finds a Need for New Crest House". Canyon  
Courier. Evergreen, Colorado. August 29, 1984, p. 3.

Rocky Mountain News. Denver, Colorado. July 24, 1986, p.26.

Supplemental Material

1. Articles

The above articles are located in the Colorado Historical Society,  
1300 Broadway, Denver, Colorado 80202.

2. Photographs

Several original photographs are located in the Colorado Historical  
Society, 1300 Broadway, Denver, Colorado 80202.

Prepared by: Frederic J. Athearn

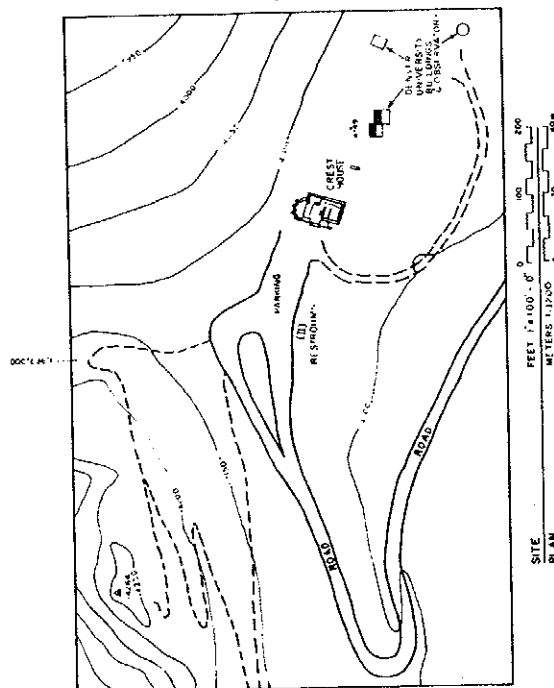
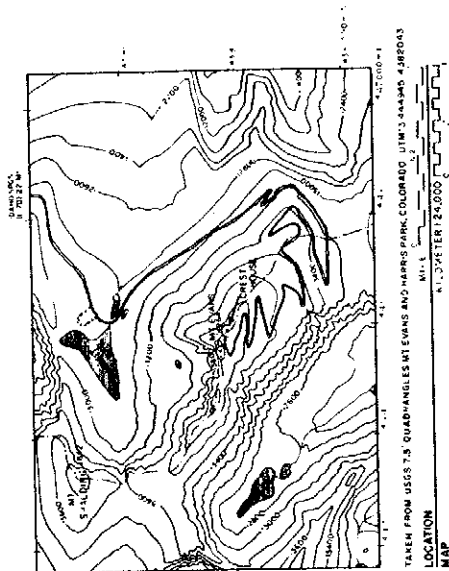
Historian

Bureau of Land Management

September 18, 1986

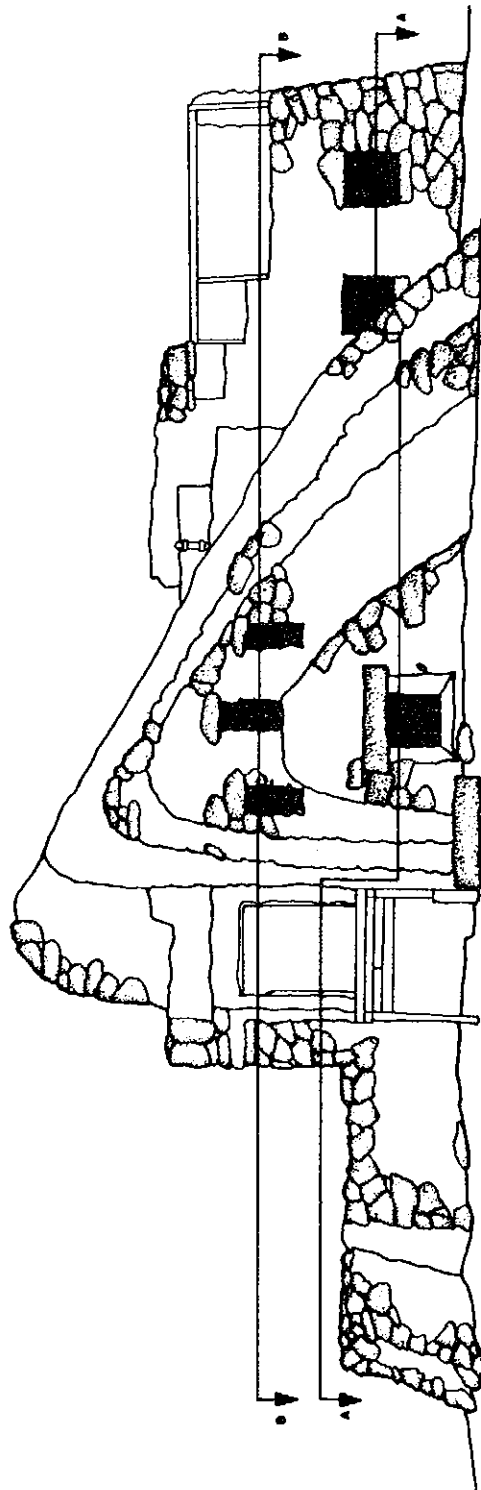
# THE MOUNT EVANS CREST HOUSE

MT. EVANS CREST HOUSE  
HABS No. CO-81 (Page 11)

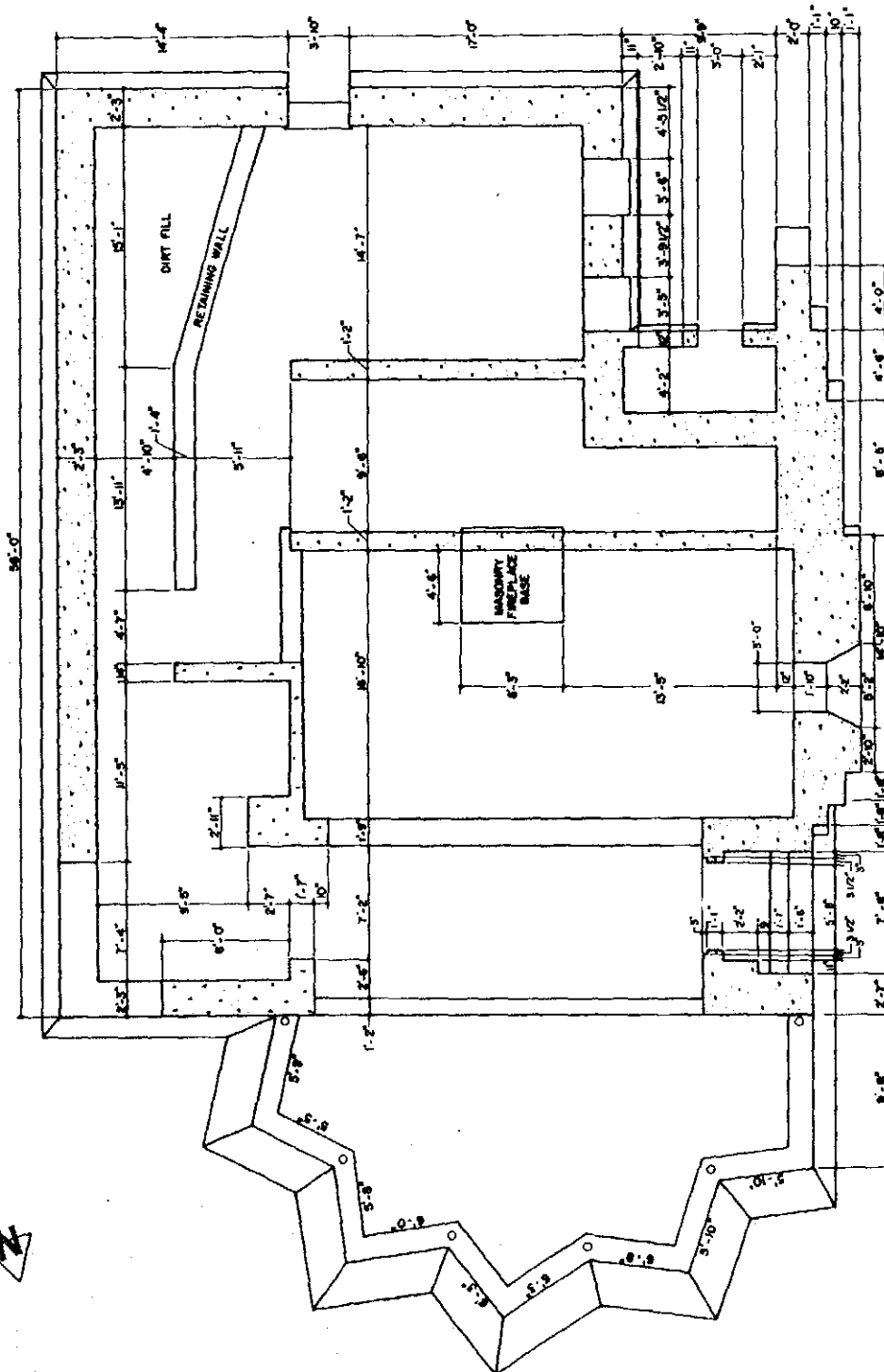


THE MOUNT EVANS CREST HOUSE RUINS ARE LOCATED AT AN ALTITUDE OF 14,122 FEET, ON THE SUMMIT OF MOUNT EVANS, COLORADO. IT WAS BUILT IN 1940-1941 BY JUSTUS "GUS" ROELING AND WAS DESIGNED BY ARCHITECT EDWIN A. FRANCIS. THE BUILDING WAS MADE OF POURED CONCRETE, NATIVE STONE FACING, STEEL, GLASS, AND WOOD. ITS DESIGN WAS A COMBINATION OF ORGANIC, FUTURISTIC, AND ART MODERNELEMENTS. THE BUILDING ALSO FEATURED HARWOOD FLOORS, KNOTTY PINE PANELING, AND LARGE EXPANSES OF GLASS.

THE CREST HOUSE COST \$50,000 TO CONSTRUCT AND WAS FINANCED BY THAYER TUTT (COLORADO SPRINGS), QUIGG NEWTON (DENVER), AND W. S. GARNSEY III. IT WAS BUILT TO SERVE TOURISTS AND WAS OPERATED DURING THE SUMMER SEASON. MOUNT EVANS IS THE HIGHEST AUTO ROAD IN THE UNITED STATES. THIS PROPERTY WAS SOLD TO HELEN WILSON STEWART IN 1956. IN 1969 THE PROPERTY REVERTED TO THE U.S. FOREST SERVICE, UPON WHOM LAND IT IS LOCATED. ON SEPTEMBER 1, 1979 A PROPANE CAUSED FIRE GUTTED THE CREST HOUSE, LEAVING ONLY THE WALLS STANDING. SINCE THAT TIME, THE SITE HAS BEEN CLEARED AND ONLY THE FOUR WALLS REMAIN. THE CREST HOUSE WAS DETERMINED ELIGIBLE FOR INCLUSION IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES BY THE COLORADO STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER IN 1986.

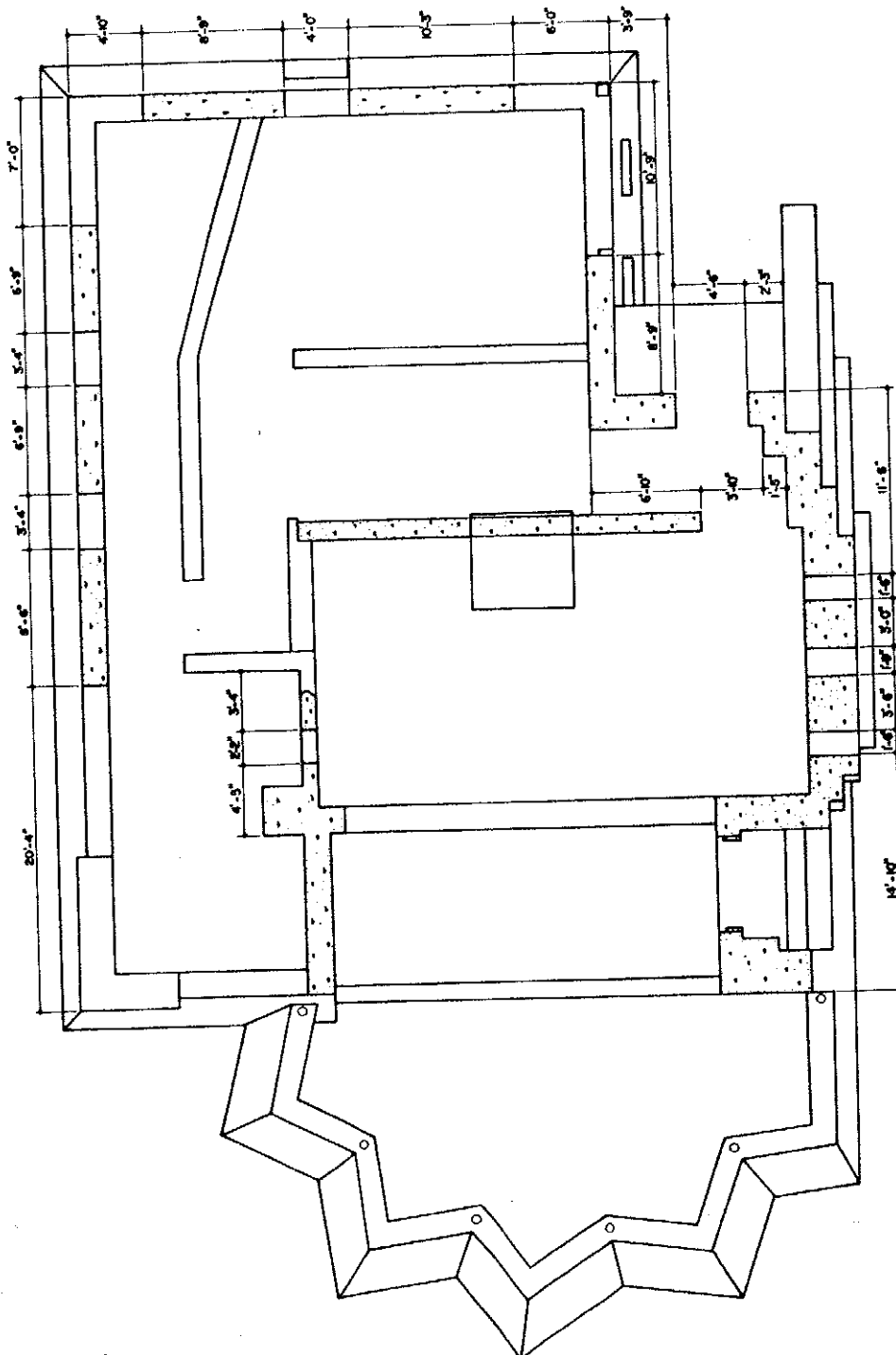


**LOWER LEVEL**



**SECTION A-A**

**WIDE MOUTH**



**SECTION 8-B**